

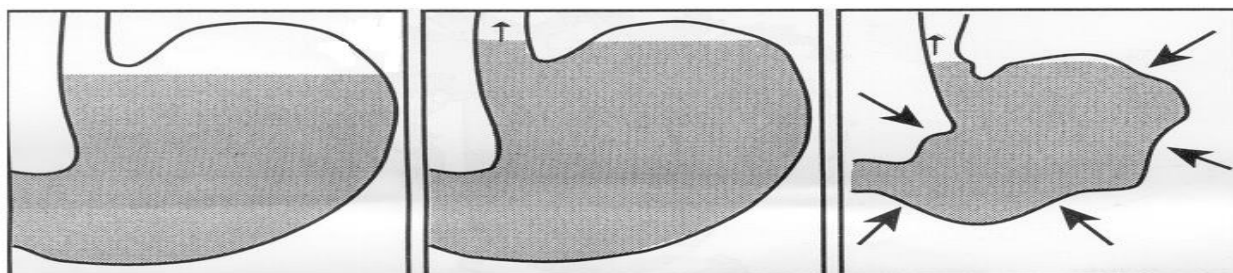
Patient Information Heartburn

Endoscopy Unit Royal Gwent Hospital

What is heartburn?

Most people experience heartburn from time to time. It is usually a burning discomfort sensed in the front of the chest, which can sometimes spread up into the neck or between the shoulder blades. Sometimes heartburn can be accompanied by belching or acid-tasting fluid in the back of the mouth.

Fortunately, despite its name, "heartburn" is merely a sign of irritation of the oesophagus (the tube connecting the mouth to the stomach), caused by acid juices rising from the stomach. Treatment is only needed when heartburn becomes frequent or troublesome.



When you are standing acid does not normally rise into the oesophagus

When you bend or lean over, acid can enter the oesophagus

Pressure on the stomach can also push acid into the oesophagus

What is the treatment for heartburn?

Common antacid medicines are Gaviscon and Gastrocote. These can be taken up to four times daily - after each meal and at bedtime. If you have been prescribed antacid tablets it is important that they are well chewed before swallowing. This is to ensure that they arrive in the stomach in a form, which generates a protective layer to prevent the normal stomach acid from rising in to the oesophagus. Liquid medicine is ready to work as soon as it is swallowed. Your doctor may prescribe stronger tablets to reduce stomach acid. These should be taken as prescribed. In some patients with heartburn these are taken when needed rather than everyday.

How can I prevent heartburn?

You can prevent heartburn by doing the following:-

- **Raise the head of your bed**
Raising the head of your bed 4" - 8" (with blocks under the legs at the foot of the bed) helps prevent acid going into the oesophagus when you lie down to sleep.
- **Avoid bending or stooping**
Try to bend your knees rather than your midriff - this keeps the stomach upright
- **Cut out smoking**
Smoking reduces the efficiency of the muscle, which closes the stomach entrance.
- **Avoid pressure on the stomach**
Do not sit in a hunched or strained position. This puts pressure on the stomach and forces acid into the oesophagus. Avoid heavy meals and try not to get overweight - both put pressure on the stomach.
- **Avoid hot liquids and spicy foods**
Curries and other strong tasting foods such as mustard should be taken in moderation. Common sense and experience will tell you which foods you can manage.
- **Avoid certain foods**
Onions and cucumbers can cause heartburn. Be careful with them. Avoid fats and use less sugar, tea and coffee.
- **Avoid eating before retiring to bed**
Allow at least 3 - 4 hrs between your evening meal and lying down to sleep.